



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society

MS Learn Online Feature Presentation

Personal Insights & Tools for Coping with MS Featuring: Cathy-Lee Benbow

Support Systems

Holly: My support base for the most part has stayed the same because it's really family. But I do have some very close friends that have been around for most of the disease experience.

Susan: I find comfort in my faith. I find comfort in my friends and family.

Stephen: I guess this support group, the Young Adults with MS support group that I'm in has been a great source of support, a great place to vent and understand how other people adapt to it.

Susan: I've lost friends, but I've gained friends that I didn't know were friends.

>>Kate Milliken: Hello, I'm Kate Milliken, and welcome to MS Learn Online. Hearing the experiences of others can often bring new insights and hope to those of us who are living with MS. Throughout this video we will hear from a number of people who candidly share with us how they go about coping with this disease. In addition to these people living with MS, we'll chat with Cathy-Lee Benbow, manager of adult mental health services at the London Health Sciences Centre in London, Ontario. Cathy will help us explore some coping techniques and strategies to help work through the challenges of living with MS. Cathy-Lee, welcome to MS Learn Online.

>>Cathy-Lee Benbow: Thank you.

>> **Kate Milliken:** We'd love just to start very simply with one question, which is how important is it to have a support system when living with MS?

>> **Cathy-Lee Benbow:** Having a support system is important to all of us. So, being able to identify those relationships we have that nurture and sustain us, and that we can nurture and sustain reciprocally back is very important to our overall mental health, but is especially key as we live with challenges related to chronic illness. In receiving support from everything related to concrete needs, like assistance getting back and forth to physician appointments, to those more affirmative needs, like feeling love, care, and overall support and understanding about the illness that we live with.

>> **Kate Milliken:** I think there are two types of support that people find. One are family and friends, and another outlet is finding people who actually have MS through support groups.

>> **Cathy-Lee Benbow:** I think having support from family and friends is very important because they often are that key group that we spend most of our time with certainly prior to diagnosis. And so having those relationships sustain us ongoing throughout an illness is very important. However, I think there is a true joy in being in the presence of people who truly know, and that is where the social support from people who actually live with the illness is very key and very helpful.

>> **Kate Milliken:** In the way that MS is individual for everybody, I also think people's -- kind of where they're from and who they have around them is individual. And there are some people who are fortunate enough to have family and friends who are supportive. What advice would you give those people on how to find a support system?

>> **Cathy-Lee Benbow:** I think it is very true that not everyone will have that immediate support system right at time of diagnosis. And the first thing I would suggest to clients that I worked with was that they begin to explore in their local community other supports. I think naturally as a society we think we should receive support from family and those close friends, but for various reasons either we don't have family nearby or family are caught up in other issues and can't provide that kind of support.

So, the first step I would suggest is that people reach out into their community to see what other supports there may be. A church, a community of faith, as mentioned in

one of the video clips, can be a place that people will find that support. Reaching out to their local MS Society and getting involved in those activities. Some clients will actually get involved in something totally different. So, it is important to open ourselves up to what are the opportunities within my community, defining community perhaps in a very different way.

People will find that that co-worker who they had very minimal chitchat with over lunch, after diagnosis suddenly is someone who says, "I have a cousin who lives with that illness and can I connect up the two of you?" Or they become much closer within their work relationship around the discussions they have now that there is MS in their relationship.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Cathy-Lee, thank you so much. Your experience is obvious and helpful. So, thanks so much for being here.

>>**Cathy-Lee Benbow:** Thank you.

>>**Kate Milliken:** If you would like to get more information on multiple sclerosis go to NationalMSSociety.org. This is Kate Milliken. Thank you for joining us.